

DOCUMENTS

1

DIALOGUE BETWEEN
CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

PART TWO

Christian Guidelines for
Dialogue with Muslims

Edited by
AHMAD VON DENFFER



The Islamic Foundation الاسلامية

**DOCUMENTS ON CHRISTIANITY
AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS
No.1**

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AND MUSLIMS**

2. Christian Guidelines for Dialogue with Muslims

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Ahmad von Denffer**

The Islamic Foundation

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PREFACE

This collection of 'Guidelines for Dialogue' brought together from various sources aims at acquainting the reader with some of the policy statements adopted by Christian institutions and organizations for their dialogue with Muslims. A brief survey on encounters and dialogue between Christians and Muslims and a collection of the resolutions and statements from the major Christian-Muslim dialogue meetings are published separately and shed further light on this side of Christian-Muslim relations. The nine documents of the collection on 'Guidelines' come from Catholic, Protestant and Anglican sources and have been arranged chronologically, covering the past 25 years. Some of them are extracts, others complete statements. Common to all of them and most important for the Muslim reader is that each document constitutes some kind of declaration of intent, which needs to be considered as such as well as against the background of Christian-Muslim relations, mission and dialogue, as they really are.

It is hoped that the present collection of documents as well as the other papers on Christian-Muslim relations will be of value for both Christians and Muslims, but in particular for Muslims who are in direct contact with Christians on various occasions.

Interfaith Unit
The Islamic Foundation

1. DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS*

Vatican II, Nostra Aetate, 28 October, 1965.

The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgement and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

Over the centuries, many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.

*This is the well-known declaration 'Nostra Aetate' adopted by the Second Vatican Council on 28 October, 1965. While here only Section 3, referring to Muslims, has been reproduced, the complete declaration also deals with all other religions. The main part of the declaration in fact is dedicated to the relations between Judaism and the Church, which was perhaps the most burning issue at the time of the council. Note that the declaration does not refer to 'Islam', but to Muslims, and no mention is made of the Prophet Muhammad.

2. TOWARDS A DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM

– by Louis Gardet*

Preparations

Both sides must strive with patience to remove the misunderstandings as well as the completely false ideas which too many Christians have of Islam, as well as certain presentations of Christianity which the Muslim finds in his own tradition and which the Christian cannot recognize at all.

Thus the Christian has the task not only to show, but also to make the people he speaks to and his Muslim friends realize that his faith is really monotheistic and that it too demands a very pure interpretation (which will not cover the Muslim conception, but is no less exacting) of God's transcendence. And further, the relation between the spiritual and the temporal is regarded differently in different places. It follows that the joining of the spiritual and the temporal in Islam is not confusion and that their separation in Christianity is not a Rousseau-ist separation etc. Therefore, Christian values, shown forth in the lives of those whose faith is within them, must be presented not as a condemnation of Muslim values, but as the goal of 'stepping stones' which truly exist in Islam (trust in God, the bearing of hard trials, sincerity and truthfulness . . .) and which in the best examples have been lived out for themselves in the lives of spiritual Muslims. One must know how to rejoice in these with no reservations.

*This essay, published in 1966, is one of the earlier Roman Catholic statements on dialogue between Christians and Muslims, following the declaration of 'Nostra Aetate'.

Possible subjects for discussion

I shall confine myself to some cultural themes, of 'religious (temporal) culture'. A patient study of the philosophical-theological thought of Islam and frequent and wide contacts with many Muslim thinkers or young inquirers lead me to say:

There are as it were three great 'guidelines' which control not only his thinking but also the Muslim's whole attitude to the world, man and God, and which strike me as particularly useful to get a discussion going.

Firstly, a rigorous interpretation of divine transcendence, grasped for its own sake, but also – and above all – in the relations between God and the world, between God and man. This is not so much a completely speculative view, but rather a way of feeling. Islam, 'the surrender of one's whole being', (to God) presents itself in a single action, as a consistent faith, and as a way of acting which is essential in relation to 'the Lord who created you', as the Qur'an says. But it is clear, and this was the whole drama of Muslim theological thought, that on the contrary, the problem that was raised was that of double causality, divine and human, the problem of the 'acts' (*af' al*) of God and of man, and as a result, that of human freedom.

The problem here was less that of a confrontation between Christian and Muslim thinking than of a common effort to consider this problem of 'acts', allowance being made for recent progress in the science of man and in knowledge itself. And perhaps Muslim thought would find as it were a call to revival and advance without the loss of its specific nature, in a metaphysical view where a participation (analogical) of being and acting, moving from the uncreated Cause to the created cause, far from obscuring the transcendence of the Most High, defines more clearly the absolute mystery. I shall cite here as a simple example, the way the thinking of a young Muslim teacher progressed. He was a firm believer who, while preparing a thesis on 'the concept of freedom according to the Mu'tazilites' himself asked to make a close study of the Christian idea of freedom. Such cases are less rare than one might think. One had to be able to respond to this expectation, in a friendly spirit of trustful co-operation, with full respect

for the research undertaken, without seeking in any way to 'refute' or 'impose'. But also without producing any doctrine of relativity. One must bear witness to truth, and wait with sympathy and respect for the truth one's companion in discussion can also contribute.

The second 'guideline' seems to me to be precisely this of witness; witness that God, by his Word addressed to his rational creatures, vindicates Himself; witness that the prophet-messenger (*rasul*), by delivering to men the message given him, vindicates God; witness that all men must vindicate God by their interior conviction of truth (*tasdiq*) and their exterior formulation of their faith (*qawl*). 'In Muslim thought', said Louis Massignon, 'the human being is defined as a "witness of God" '. If the schools differ on the contents of the faith, they are entirely in agreement in defining it by witness, 'the witness of members' by the doing of prescribed tasks, the privileged witness of the word and the heart (*shahada*), the inner witness of the agreement of heart and intellect (*tasdiq*) . . .

I am very willing to believe that here new areas lie open for Muslim thought to explore. For witness raises the question of the existence outside the mind of Him to whom one witnesses and Him before whom one witnesses. This is a whole theory of knowledge which would need to be expounded and given a place. The temptation (I am thinking of some young Muslim inquirer) would be to give a reply based on phenomenological 'reductions' which, by putting 'in brackets' the existence of him to whom one witnesses, in fact compromises the authenticity of the witness itself. Another temptation, and no less a one, which one sometimes comes across, would be to want to explain everything pure and simply by 'depth psychology', where the spiritual subconscious is swallowed and suppressed by the animal unconscious or subconscious.

Phenomenological reductions, depth psychology; the Christian philosophy confronts them both with a question as to the person and his existential foundation, his acts and the object of his action outside his mind. The Muslim problem, centred on witness, contributes to this in perhaps a more abrupt manner, but one which in its turn asks of what has

been affirmed, with all its consequences, the value of a judgement on existence and a judgement on truth.

The third guideline would be the taking up, in an organically constituted whole, of scattered but coherent values, already existing within Islam, values of a moral philosophy or a moral theology or if one prefers this, of a science of human actions finalized by a salvation which is not only of this world. Justice and injustice, repentance and its value, faults great and small, virtues and vices, are all themes taken up by Muslims when discussing 'actions', 'final ends' and 'the authority of the good'.

In the past, however, Islam has not worked out for itself its moral theology. It was enough for it to put the elements of it together whenever God's imposition of the precepts of divine Law (*taklif*) required an essential response from the 'believer'. It would seem strange if the recent progress of the sciences of man do not lead the Muslim thinker to re-examine the problem of the *taklif* within the dimensions of a renewed anthropology and sociology; to put it another way, within the dimensions of a moral philosophy which would bring to hand the fundamental materials for setting up a moral theology.

Christian philosophy should enlarge (enlarge, not refound) its anthropology and elaborate its sociology, taking into account the new facts established by science. Christian moral theology exists; it is one of the functions of theology, and its foundations remain secure. But it must hold itself open to the contributions and legitimate questions which a moral philosophy, adequately grasped, must extract from contemporary ethnology, sociology, and anthropology. The temptation – in Christianity as well as in Islam – would be to take these recently established facts as incontestable data, when it is a question of reinterpreting and assigning their position from a higher viewpoint.

This third 'guideline' should not be separated from the others. All three converge towards the keystone which is the Mystery of God himself in his transcendent action on the world and on human freedom. It is the response of that human freedom, working freely under the divine initiative, that must produce a moral theology. And is not this one of the major

questions in contemporary Muslim thought?

To conclude these few remarks: are not these three converging guidelines themselves capable of marking out some area where a particularly fruitful dialogue between Muslim and Christian thought might first take place? In different places, the emphasis varies, ways of explanation and references to the Word of God diverge, and the mystery of salvation does not unfold according to the same divine Economy. It is right to be clear about this. But sincere exchanges are none the less possible and highly desirable. There must be on all sides a desire, a wish for sympathy and intellectual fairness, an anxiety to understand precisely the other's thought. And perhaps, in doing this, we shall see more than once the dialogue breaking off in favour of a common task of philosophical research and exploration.

This is the first wish I should express in addressing today's Muslim thinkers. I express it hopefully, for the first fruits of this dialogue are already appearing. Names could be mentioned. It is indeed a task which needs staying power and there is no lack of obstacles. Real mutual knowledge of Christianity by the Muslim and of Islam by Christians is already a difficult thing; and should it not also be supplemented by a common knowledge of all modern thought and science? But we believe that it is only the interior living-out of faith in God and the theological meaning of the destiny of man, which can assign to the enquiries undertaken their rightful place; and, without denying or in any way minimizing the differences and divergences, will know sympathetically and with respect how to use them to further mutual understanding and, if God wills, a common love of the Truth.

3. WHAT RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE SHOULD THE CHRISTIAN ADOPT?*

What we have said so far applies to all forms of dialogue with Muslims, whatever the purpose one may have in mind. But the dialogue may be concerned with religious matters, either doctrinal or spiritual, and the Christian may find himself called upon to witness to his faith, or to give his own personal point of view. In fact, quite often, a Muslim likes to discuss other than purely temporal matters, especially if he is aware that the person to whom he is speaking is a convinced Christian.

We should note in passing the important fact that the two sides engage in dialogue with a quite different mentality. A Muslim who has been educated in a more religious, or perhaps more exactly, a less secular atmosphere, often takes for granted that every exchange of views has a religious aspect or refers to the world of religion as he knows it. We of the West are used to distinguishing between spiritual and temporal matters: our outlook is more secular; and we can think more easily in terms of dialogue on cultural and technical matters concerning human beings as such, and excluding all reference to religion. Even in such conditions an encounter can bear fruit, but it does not leave the Muslim fully satisfied. He feels more or less vaguely that one aspect of his problems has been left unexamined. It may happen that he seeks to discuss matters with a man, not so much

*Extracted from the more comprehensive 'Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians', published first in 1969 by the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians. Similar guideline publications have been produced for dialogue with other religions.

because he is a student of Arabic, or of Islamics, a philosopher or a technician, but particularly because he is a Christian. In such cases there is a risk that he will be surprised not to encounter the Christian as such in the man with whom he is talking. So we must be aware of his implicit desire in this matter. It has not always been emphasized, but experience goes to prove, that this mentality is to be found in most Muslims we meet, even in those who call themselves rationalists, but who are concerned about the society in which they live and want to help it to develop along modern lines.

It is impossible then for the Christian to avoid the religious aspects of dialogue. Sooner or later he will find himself called upon to speak as a member of his church. What line of conduct should he follow when this happens? There are two attitudes, based on solid conviction, that appear to be essential; both what he says and his intentions must be sincere, and he must frankly put himself forward as a Christian without minimizing his faith or stating it in a falsely attractive manner. This is what the Church requires of him.

(1) One must state one's position frankly

The thought that the other person is aiming at conversion can render all dialogue impossible. It would seem that this danger no longer exists in relations between Catholics and other Christians, or between believers and non-believers. It is still present when Christians and Muslims meet. Very often the latter will be convinced that all forms of dialogue are just new methods of proselytism. If this is really the case, it would be better to avoid for the time being any kind of dialogue with religious implications and allow time to break down prejudices and give people the chance to become more mature in their outlook. It would be a mere waste of time and effort to take part in discussions which would only end in stalemate and misunderstanding.

In the meantime, we must continue to make our position plain. A clear idea of what we are trying to do must inspire every step we take in the way of dialogue. This is not essentially a means of converting others to our way of

thinking or to our faith. Its main purpose is to make us accept, in peace and joy, other people just as they are, so as to help one another to proclaim more perfectly the existence in all men of that truth and goodness, which God has revealed in His creatures.

In fact, what we are trying to do is to march shoulder to shoulder through this modern world, where every kind of faith is queried, and to confide to one another all the treasures of our mutual faith, so that it may live and flourish in us and reach its uttermost development. We must never lose our awareness of and respect for the tenets of another's faith, even if it differs from our own. However, this must be accompanied by a great care for our common patrimony and the firm purpose to help one another so that each may develop to the full his experience of the spiritual. Both the Christian and the Muslim must strive to be true believers, anxious to continue to purify their personal faith and to make it more alive by their contacts with one another.

The proof that such frankness with one another has no ulterior motive will be the joy we experience in discovering that our partner really believes in his faith, and in finding that we share certain religious affinities in common and that to a certain degree we are spiritual cousins even if not yet brothers. This joy will be based on the hope of seeing the other person develop in himself his own special religious values, by means of which we can explore new ways of living as brothers in the sight of God.

It was this thought that inspired the Secretariat when in December, 1967 it invited Christians to offer their best wishes to Muslims at the end of Ramadan. It then wrote: 'This spirit of approaching God and submitting oneself to his holy will, which constitutes the spirit of Ramadan, is an authentic religious value. Christians can only rejoice at finding this spirit expressed outside their own religious affiliation, even though in a different form from that which it has in their own spiritual context. Let us be glad to see God honoured by millions of men and women, old and young, sometimes at the cost of very great sacrifices'.

(2) Make clear that one is a Christian

The dialogue would lose all meaning if the Christian, in order to put himself on the same level as the Muslim, were to reduce his faith to a few vague statements and water down the dogmas which differ from the affirmations of the Qur'an. What the Muslim wants to encounter is the Christian in all the plenitude of his spiritual life and in the fullness of his faith, and not a Western humanist more or less under the influence of a Christian education. This is even something which is demanded in the name of truth and loyalty, which does not involve levelling down our faith to a common denominator but co-existence in a mutual acceptance of differences.

This attitude has a two-fold implication: the first concerns our own faith and the second the religious values in the lives of non-Christians.

(3) We must renew our knowledge of our own faith

Earlier in this paper we insisted on the importance of knowing Islamic religious thought as objectively as possible. On the other hand, it is important that every Christian should know his own religion better so that it may more profoundly transform his life. If this is true of all contacts with non-Christian religious circles, it is obviously much more important when dealing with Islam because we invoke in common the patriarch Abraham, 'Our Father in the Faith', as Christians call him, 'God's friend', as the Muslims say, and because we both affirm that God is One, Living, the Creator (*wahid, hayy, khaliq*), who speaks to man through prophets in order to guide them towards eternal salvation. Because such statements are common to us both, it is all the more necessary to understand how they are accepted in practice on either side, in what way they differ from one religious atmosphere to another, and why Islam rejects the mystery of salvation which the Church proclaims.

Unless it is a question of one's duty, there is no need at all for anyone to do a great deal of research and to engage in theological controversy for this purpose. Still less does it

mean thinking out some presentation or other of our Christian faith that we piously imagine a Muslim could accept without difficulty. In any case, it is not primarily a question of explaining our faith to a Muslim, but what is important is that I, who speak as a Christian, should know my faith thoroughly and practise it as fully and as authentically as possible.

The Christian owes it to himself and to the person with whom he is speaking to study ever more thoroughly the worthwhile aspects of his own faith, even those, and perhaps one might say especially those, about which he will never have an opportunity to speak. Why am I a Christian? Why is it Jesus who leads me through his Gospel to the mysteries revealed by God? Why does the Church possess for me words of truth that will never pass away? The mystery of salvation is a mystery of life: the life of God in a faithful soul and one that I must live in a total donation of myself to him who has 'the words of eternal life' (Jn. 6: 68). This does not entail thinking that I am nearer to God than a sincere and pious Muslim, for that is something that God alone knows. Perhaps, without his realizing it, he is already oriented towards the People of God, not in spite of Islam, but because he has taken his stand on truths to be believed and to be put into practice which Islamic tradition, from whatever source it may have acquired them, has transmitted to him, and which divine grace, in a pure heart, can enlighten, purify and raise to a higher level. 'I don't possess the truth, it is the truth that possesses me', said a Christian Arab who was obsessed by the need to initiate dialogue with his Muslim brethren.

(4) A new understanding of religions in terms of religious values

We have no intention of going into this question in connection with the theology of salvation. We shall treat it here from the concrete and historical angle in connection with religious culture. Now, when we come to consider Islam from this point of view, we must admit that it is a religion which has handed on values which are among the highest

and the most respectable in the world: adoration of God, praise of his greatness and submission to his Will. Here it will be sufficient to refer once again to the Council text on non-Christian religions: 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect on those ways of life and conduct, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men' (Nostra Aetate, 2).

This attitude of respect should not be based on mere opportunism, or even on the friendship we may feel for one individual or another, but on the fact that Islam is a means which, in given circumstances, helps men to draw nearer to God. We must respect the belief of men, who see no other way in which to approach God.

For the Christian, religions only have a religious value if they are contributing to the realization of God's plan for mankind. While actively maintaining in ourselves this tension towards the fulfilment of our being, we must realize that this tension is also at work in the followers of Islam. This will help us to enter into dialogue with Muslims loyally and with a deep respect for their faith. Our witness must become part of this tension. It should be the source of very great joy for us to see them engaging in a completely sincere and authentic search for God, for then we can share their journey and take part in their quest for the truth. Thus hand in hand we shall come under the influence of that spiritual dynamism which will sweep us along through the vicissitudes of life towards union with God.

Of course, such frankness will not put an end to all misunderstandings. Relations between Christians and Muslims have been bedevilled by so many prejudices in the past that it will take time, and the witness of disinterested sympathy and affection on our part, to breach the wall of suspicion that separates us. There is an element of risk in all dialogue on spiritual and religious matters, and both from our side as well as from the Muslim side there are plenty of people to warn us of the dangers. One can only take part in it usefully if one is completely frank, if one has a deep respect

for the personal freedom of others, a profound sense of the truth and a sincere desire to accept the holy will of God. Such frankness not only towards others, but also towards oneself and God, is one of the most important conditions for a fruitful spiritual encounter with Muslims.

Dialogue requires stern self-discipline. It purifies even our very intentions. It involves first of all a struggle with ourselves, to overcome our lack of understanding and our own prejudices. The important thing is to give a witness of renewal in our relations with others. We must be convinced that the confidence we show in others will cause them to show confidence in us, and that our new approach will prove contagious. This is a task which often takes a long time, and which requires both a proper understanding of the situation and boundless love. It also demands a great deal of humility.

When all is said and done, the dialogue we engage in must correspond to what the Muslims expect of us. It must be a dialogue inspired by love. For the Qur'an states: 'Thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say "We are Christians"; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they are not proud' (5: 82). And again, 'We gave unto him (i.e. Jesus) the Gospel. And we set in the hearts of those who followed him tenderness and mercy (*ra'fatan wa rahma*)' (57: 27).

We can sum up the complete attitude of a Christian who engages in dialogue in the words of love and truth. 'Only truth can overcome divisions between men and truth's victory is love', said St. Augustine.

4. THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE OF LIVING FAITHS AND IDEOLOGIES

An Interim Policy Statement and Guidelines*

I. Preamble

1. The World Council of Churches through the life and witness of its constituent churches and through the activities it undertakes on their behalf is involved in manifold relationships with people in different countries. Dialogue, understood as a human activity in which spiritual, intellectual and practical elements are involved, is a natural part of this relationship. At the present time it is inevitable, urgent and full of opportunity. It is inevitable because everywhere in the world Christians are now living in pluralistic societies. It is urgent because all men are under common pressures in the search for justice, peace and a hopeful future. It is full of opportunity because Christians can now, in new ways, discover new aspects of the servanthood and lordship of Christ and new implications for the witness of the Church in the context of moving towards a common human community.

2. Our faith in Jesus Christ who became man for all men in all times sustains us in dialogue. The expression of this faith in the life and witness of the Church leads us to develop

*These guidelines were adopted at the Central Committee meeting of the World Council of Churches at Addis Ababa in January, 1971 to explain the policy of the WCC's Sub-unit on Dialogue with men of living faiths and ideologies. This sub-unit has, among others, a desk for relations with Muslims.

relationships with men of different faiths and ideologies. Jesus Christ who makes us free draws us out of isolation into genuine dialogue into which we enter with faith in the promise of Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth.

3. This was affirmed at Uppsala, 1968, where it was stated: 'The meeting with men of other faiths or of no faith must lead to dialogue. A Christian's dialogue with another implies neither a denial of the uniqueness of Christ, nor any loss of his own commitment to Christ but rather that a genuinely Christian approach to others must be human, personal, relevant and humble' (Uppsala 68 Report, Geneva, p.29). Such a dialogue presupposes a spiritual renewal in our churches and is, at the same time, itself a sign of such renewal in our churches and our societies.

4. For centuries the Church in many countries has lived among people of different faiths. Dialogue between Christians and men of other faiths is therefore not a new venture. In recent years, many organized dialogues between individuals and groups have taken place. Many of them have been bilateral and some multilateral. Within this general development, various units of the World Council have organized or participated in such dialogues. These include a continuing dialogue with Jews and more recently the beginning of dialogue with Muslims. There is also a history of consultations about the relationship of Christians with men of other faiths, e.g. Mexico 1963 and Kandy 1967. Similar consultations have also been held regionally, e.g. by the East Asia Christian Conference and the All Africa Conference of Churches. In the sphere of ideologies dialogues have also been taking place between Christians and Marxists. With men of other faiths, dialogues have been going on for a number of years in several Christian Study Centres and also under the auspices of regional Councils. In March, 1970, people of four different faiths – Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim – were brought together at the Ajaltoun (Lebanon) Consultation. Thus there has been a considerable amount of work on various converging lines and therefore this is not a new issue to come before the World Council. Christians in many

countries are not just talking about dialogue; they are already involved in it at various levels and are at many points committed to it in the context of living relationship with men of other faiths and ideologies.

II. Points to be noted and issues to be studied

5. In the light of the experience of both bilateral and multilateral dialogues certain points emerge for recognition and certain issues need further reflection. They need to be taken into account in developing the World Council's relationship with men of other faiths and ideologies. One thing, however, is clear. Christians enter into all forms of dialogue from the standpoint of their faith in Jesus Christ and their obligation to witness to him. Love requires us to recognize and respect the integrity of our partners who enter into dialogue from the standpoint of their faith and commitment.

A

Some of the points that have emerged may be stated as follows:

6. Opportunities and occasions for dialogue are different in different situations. They are grounded in the humanity in which we all share and which Christ redeems. Therefore dialogue cannot and must not be confined to men of religious faiths but must also involve men of secular ideologies. Further, in humanity as we experience it and as we look for its fulfilment in Christ the 'spiritual' and the 'material' cannot be separated, but constantly impinge on each other in our common quest for the well-being of man. 'In dialogue, we share our common humanity, its dignity and fallenness, and express our common concern for that humanity' (Uppsala 68 Report, Geneva, p.29).

7. Dialogue is concerned with much more than talking together. It is a process in which individuals and communities learn to lose their fear and distrust of each other and enter into a new confidence. It is thus a dynamic contact of life

with life, concerned with living together and acting together.

8. Dialogue offers the promise of discovering new dimensions of understanding our faith. It also offers opportunities for new relationships between Christians and men of other faiths which were not seen before. Moreover, in dialogue our Christian faith can also be tested and strengthened. Such dialogues therefore are a sign of hope.

9. Dialogue has no single pattern.

(a) Bilateral conversations at local, regional and international levels will need to continue. According to the different partners and varying common points of reference each dialogue has its own specific character and may raise different theological questions. For example, dialogue with Jews or Muslims may be different from dialogue with followers of traditional, renascent or new religions in Asia. Dialogue with men of traditional religions of Africa raises particular questions. These specific dialogues need to be pursued. At the present time it may well be that bilateral dialogues dealing with specific problems should be given priority. There is also the need to develop appropriate multilateral dialogues with men of other faiths and ideologies.

(b) Dialogue involves living relationships of different types, the expressions of which cannot be predetermined. However, certain types of dialogue may be mentioned which will have different purposes.

- (i) Dialogue for the sake of common action in the service of men in pluralistic societies;
- (ii) Dialogue for the sake of better mutual understanding between people of living faiths and ideologies;
- (iii) Dialogue for the sake of indigenization of the Christian faith in different cultures.

In all these forms of dialogue the Christian has to be 'ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him' (I Peter 3: 15).

10. Dialogue must take place in freedom. Each partner must be understood as he understands himself, and his freedom to be committed to his faith must be fully respected. Without this freedom to be committed, to be open, to witness, to change and to be changed, genuine dialogue is impossible.

B

11. The World Council comprises various confessional heritages and a wide variety of convictions. Therefore it does not have one united view of dialogue with men of other faiths. The plurality of cultural situations as well as the varieties of cultural and historical heritages which Christians bring from their past play a significant role in the discussion. Therefore there is need for frank and continuing discussion among the churches on the nature and meaning of dialogue as well as on the experience and insights gained. The engagement of the World Council in dialogue is to be understood as a common adventure of the churches. There are a number of issues that have already emerged and which need to be faced as dialogue continues. Among the questions that need to be studied are the following:

12. What are the fundamental theological implications of dialogue? This requires us to struggle together as Christians with important questions such as: What is the meaning of the saving work of God in Christ and of the salvation offered to all men through his cross and resurrection? What is the relation of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to his presence and activity in the whole world, and in particular in the lives and traditions of men of other faiths and ideologies?

13. What is the relation between dialogue, mission and witness? Witnessing to the love of God in Christ is an obligation inherent in the Gospel. Dialogue for the sake of mutual understanding (compare 9 (b) (ii)) in particular loses its meaning unless we as Christians bear our witness to the salvation we receive in Jesus Christ. There is, however, acute

difference among ourselves and in our churches whether the emphasis on dialogue will blunt the cutting edge of this mission or whether the community of human and spiritual discourse created by dialogue will further it. Moreover, there is need while facing this difference among ourselves to be sensitive to the suspicion of our partners that dialogue is simply a new strategy for proselytization. We must pursue these unresolved questions in the light of insights gained through further theological study and through actual experience of dialogue.

14. How is dialogue to be understood and practised in the context of indigenization? Wherever the Church expresses its life in concrete forms it has to express the Gospel through certain cultural and intellectual forms. In the interplay between the elements of revelation and the aspects of a given culture there is the danger that the revelation may be submerged and compromised by these cultural elements. Nothing is gained by seeking to avoid this danger. New criteria have to be developed for judging what are the responsible ways of expressing the Christian faith in different cultures. Enquiries should be made whether any light is to be thrown on this question by cultural anthropology, social psychology and the history of religions. Dialogue is necessary to enable Christians to find out both what are the authentic changes which the Gospel demands and the authentic embodiment which the Gospel offers. In the context of living in dialogue with men of other faiths and ideologies, Christians have the urgent task of expressing their faith in cultural forms that are transformed, redeemed and judged in the light of the Gospel.

III. Recommendations

15. In the light of these observations the following recommendations are made, taking into account the limited resources of the World Council both in personnel and funds.

16. Member churches should be assisted to prepare groups of people able to engage in responsible dialogue with men of other faiths and ideologies in their particular countries

or regions. Where this is already being done ways and means should be found of sharing the insights gained with other churches.

17. Member churches should consider what action they can take in the following educational areas:

- (i) Teaching programmes in schools, colleges and adult educational schemes which prepare individual Christians for a proper understanding of men of other faiths and ideologies.
- (ii) Positive relationships with programmes in university departments and other institutes of higher learning which are concerned with the academic study of religions.
- (iii) The review of material used and teachings customarily given in courses of instruction at all levels in the churches, including at theological colleges and seminaries, with a view to eliminating anything which encourages fanaticism and an insensitive attitude to men of other faiths and ideologies.
- (iv) The provision of courses for members of churches who are to be sent to serve in countries other than their own so that they may be helped to live among men of other faiths.

18. The Ecumenical Institute in Bossey should be asked to hold courses and consultations from time to time for the preparation of people selected by the churches for such dialogue. Such people will help to provide a panel of resource persons for the World Council of Churches and member churches in dialogue with men of other faiths and ideologies. Full use should also be made of the regional facilities available in ecumenical study institutes and centres. Attention should also be given to collaboration with Roman Catholic Institutions which have the same concern for dialogue and relationships with men of other faiths and ideologies.

19. Consultations should be arranged, as regularly as possible, by the World Council, between Christians and men of other faiths to study a subject or subjects previously agreed upon by all concerned. These may be between Christians and members of one other faith or of a more multilateral nature. At the present stage priority may be given to bilateral dialogues of a specific nature. Such consultations need to be organized also by the regional institutes or Councils and the experience gained shared by all. There should also be positive response to initiatives for dialogue from men of other faiths and ideologies.

20. (a) There should be selective participation in world religious meetings. Such participation should be based on mutual recognition of and respect for the integrity of each faith, the freedom to question the underlying assumption of any particular meeting and the avoidance of being involved in an alliance of religions against ideologies. The World Council should not officially be involved in the organizational structure of world inter-religious organizations.

(b) Information should be gathered about the different world religious organizations in order to assist in decisions concerning selective participation.

(c) Selection should be based on the following priorities: (i) Meetings of one or more faiths called to grapple with major human problems such as justice, development and peace on a regional or worldwide basis; (ii) participation in gatherings which represent the broad streams of the life and thought of major faiths.

(d) When the World Council of Churches is sponsoring meetings on specific issues such as justice, education, the future of man etc., men of other faiths and ideologies can profitably be invited to co-operate. This co-operation will involve not only study but also common action on these issues.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OUR DIALOGUE*

We do not desire to confine our conversation and our collaboration to a group of experts. We feel an obligation to help to make possible a wider spirit and practice of dialogue in our communities. We recognize that different situations call for different sensitivities, but that certain irreducible principles should be respected. The implications of these principles will be particular to various contexts and will need to be patiently and practically worked out.

(a) Frank witness: We did not ask each other to suppress or conceal his convictions. In dialogue each should bear witness of his motives to his fellows and to God. This frank witness can help to remove complacency, suspicion or unspoken fears.

(b) Mutual respect: We believed that mutual respect was a necessary principle for our dialogue. This does not involve a stale co-existence of 'live and let live', but a sensitive regard for the partner's scruples and convictions, a sympathy for his difficulties and an admiration for his achievements. We should avoid all invidious comparisons of strength in our tradition with weakness in the other, of the ideal in one with the actuality in the other.

(c) Religious freedom: We should be scrupulous about our protection of religious liberty. This involves not only the rights of any religious minority, but also the rights of each individual. While accepting that both religious traditions

*Adopted by the participants of the Christian-Muslim dialogue at Broumana/Lebanon in 1972, which was sponsored by the World Council of Churches.

have a missionary vocation, proselytism should be avoided, whether by a majority intent upon pressing a minority to conform, or whether by a minority using economic or cultural inducements to swell its ranks. It is especially unworthy to exploit the vulnerability of the uneducated, the sick and the young.

6. A CODE OF PRACTICE*

1. Christians are servants of Jesus Christ. They seek to be guided in their judgements by the Holy Spirit in the light of the Gospel. They have a continuing responsibility to share with all men the light and truth which has come to them through Christ, and to seek their freely-given allegiance to him.

2. Christians believe that God is present in grace to the whole of his creation, and that he is working out his will to bring all to fulfilment in Christ. They are content to play their part within the great symphony of God's involvement with the universe. As part of their responsibility they work wholeheartedly for the building of a truly human community, and co-operate with all men of goodwill in doing so. They give their support to whatever sets forward the Kingdom of God.

3. Christians affirm those things which they believe to be true, good, and wholesome within Islam, thanking God for them. They count it a privilege to help Muslims to discharge the obligations which they believe they owe to God.

4. Christians pay attention to the criticisms which Muslims make of their faith and practice, and they do all they can to articulate the Gospel more effectively and intelligibly to them. They recognize the many discrepancies between Islam and Christianity, without either minimizing or putting improper emphasis upon them. In courtesy they question

*Extract from the guidelines for the Churches in their relations with Muslim communities, published by the British Council of Churches in 1976.

the doctrines and claims of Islam which conflict with the Gospel.

5. In all circumstances, Christians seek to be true disciples of the Lord Christ, and to conform to his gentleness, humility and love. They offer all their endeavours, both of witness and of friendship, to God, the Father of all, for him to use as he wishes.

7. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR A SINCERE DIALOGUE*

I. Loyalty to our faith and mutual receptivity

1. As Muslims and Christians we believe that God has revealed Himself through His Word. Muslims find this Word in the Qur'an, Christians find it in Jesus Christ himself, the Word of God incarnate. Each of our communities believes its faith to be a gift of God received by man and the appointed path for its meeting with God. For this reason we are Muslims or Christians and not adherents of some other religion or atheists.

Perfect though the Word on which our faith rests may be, however, we do not consider that the knowledge it imparts to us exhausts all the riches of this Word and mystery of God. We therefore believe, on the one hand, that our certainty of faith necessarily implies an unending search for truth, with God's help and guided by His light, and, on the other hand, that other approaches to the truth than our own and based on another Word than that on which our own faith rests are legitimate and may be fruitful also for us. In other words, Muslims recognize the validity and fruitfulness of Christian faith research, while Christians recognize the validity and fruitfulness of Muslim faith and research.

2. Pursuing this way, each of us remains firmly attached to the essence of his faith and to the vision of the world which it implies, and it is in this light, the light of faith, that

*Adopted by the participants of the 'Groupes de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien' (Islamic-Christian Research Group), a mainly Catholic initiative in France.

we wish to view the religion of the others. But we do not expect them to adopt the categories in which our own vision of faith is clothed. On both sides we need to enlarge our vision and our categories in order to take into account the religious value of the other tradition.

In other words, Christians do not require Muslims to accept the Christian's faith in Christ's divinity, for example, nor do Muslims require Christians to recognize the Qur'an as the final revelation of the Word of God and Muhammad as the supreme prophet.

3. We therefore reject every form of syncretism leading to the concealment of the essential differences between our religions. Our aim is not to suppress these differences, or to minimize them or keep quiet about them, but rather to recognize them honestly and to locate them accurately, especially since the differences are all too frequently exaggerated or else our religions are contrasted on the basis of imagined differences.

4. For the same reason, we shall not try to reconcile the irreconcilable. We seek neither to suppress or minimize our essential differences nor to find some halfway house where they would be reconciled at the cost of the truth. Our aim is to define these differences where they are really to be found rather than where they have too often been located on the basis of ossified assumptions. Convinced as we are that the points where our visions of faith converge are more numerous and more considerable than is generally imagined, we believe that to bring out these convergences would also make it easier to identify more clearly the really basic differences.

This respect for the incompatible is also applicable to the members of our group; for the Christians among themselves and for the Muslims among themselves. It cannot be taken for granted that each group will be unanimous on every point. It is quite normal that relatively important differences should emerge between adherents of the same religion. The exchange of views in a common forum will help to bridge the gap and even to harmonize positions. Differences may nevertheless remain which could only be surmounted by

doing violence to people's consciences or else adopting compromise solutions. Rejecting such false solutions, we shall faithfully note these temporarily irreducible differences and record them in any texts we may publish.

II. How 'representative' are we?

We reject in advance the objection that the members of our group and any results we may arrive at are not representative of majority thinking in the religious communities to which we belong.

Right from the time when the creation of this group for Islamo-Christian studies was first planned we were in fact agreed that membership of it should be on a purely personal basis without mandates from any religious or political hierarchy. We join it as believers, resolved to be utterly faithful to the sources of our faith, alert and critical heirs of centuries' old traditions and unreservedly identified with our respective communities of faith. We are nevertheless believers who are seeking to understand our faith more fully, to satisfy its requirements in the contemporary world and, in doing so, to help our communities to advance. We shall therefore publish the results of our studies, so that all who may find our approach and our findings of interest will be in a position to evaluate them and, it may be, to share with us their criticisms. We claim no more authority for our conclusions than the seriousness of our enquiry warrants.

III. Acceptance of the critical inspection of others

1. We Muslims and Christians accept the presentation which our partners of the other religion offer us of their faith. But in this era of encounter between cultures and peoples, each of us is led to analyse afresh the bases of our faith and to examine critically the development of our religious tradition. This analysis and critical examination can no longer be conducted in isolation. Acceptance of the critical inspection we accord to each other is one of the inescapable requirements of our time. Only as we take the other's appraisal of us into account, do we truly know

ourselves. Furthermore, we accept and welcome this inspection of ourselves by our brothers and sisters of the other religion, as we do that of any other human being, whether a believer or not; their questions, comments, criticisms – provided only that apologetic or polemical postures are excluded.

2. This also applies within the group itself. We have accepted the principle that each participant should have an adequate knowledge of the other religion and be grappling with the two conceptions – the Muslim and the Christian – in his or her own studies. Experience shows, however, that in general each views the other religion in the form in which it has traditionally been formulated and fails to take certain recent developments into account. But Christianity and Islam are both living religions and our encounter should therefore take place at the level of current thinking. We shall not be content, therefore, simply to consider the classic formulations of either religion. We should each be willing to accept the other's position as presented to us after mature reflection, with, of course, an opportunity of asking for a fuller explanation of this presentation and of subjecting it to criticism.

IV. We have no proprietary claims to the bases of our faith

We Muslims and Christians do not regard the divine Word which is the basis of our respective faiths as our exclusive property. While the person of Jesus and the attestation of the apostolic faith in the New Testament are the bases of the Christian faith, the historical fact of Jesus of Nazareth and the text of the New Testament are facts and documents accessible to all. While the Qur'an and the authentic tradition of the Prophet are the bases of the Muslim faith, the text of the Qur'an and the life of Mohammed b. Abdallah belong to the general history of mankind and form part of its spiritual heritage.

Each of us therefore recognizes other 'interpretations' than our own of the foundational history of our faith and of our Scriptures, whether based exclusively on the human

sciences or on a different faith than ours making use of these same sciences or not, as the case may be. There can therefore be a Christian or an agnostic interpretation of the Qur'an, a Muslim or agnostic interpretation of the New Testament.

V. Our brotherhood in faith

At the present time, when faith in the one God is challenged in so many and such various ways, we believe that the religions, the Muslim and the Christian religion in particular, are confronted together by these challenges. It is together, therefore, that we Muslims and Christians must respond to these challenges, both domestic and external. There is certainly no question of forming a 'common front' of believers to resist by argument or political action those who present these challenges. But we must constantly endeavour to settle those politico-religious conflicts which have led to opposition between our religions but which reflect a situation which must be put behind us, one in which faiths, religions, societies and earthly empires constitute separate blocs. We need to come together as believers, so that our respective religious communities may be informed of the issues presented to them by these challenges and be equipped to respond appropriately to them, so that the light and the hope of which these communities are the bearers may be recognized and accepted by those who seek truth and justice.

Just as Muslims recognize each other as first of all Muslim whether they are Sunnites, Chi'ites or Kharijites, and just as Christians, too, now recognize each other as first of all Christians as 'brothers and sisters in Christ', whether they happen to be Catholics, Protestants or Orthodox, so too, Muslims and Christians should recognize each other as first of all believers, 'brothers and sisters in faith in God'. In this sense, and only in this sense, do we accept the term 'ecumenism of religions'.

VI. Absence of the voice of Judaism and that of other religions and ideologies

Some will be surprised, perhaps, that we Muslims and Christians should be meeting together without any participants from the other major religions and non-religious ideologies, and in particular from Judaism. We would like to repeat here what we said when the group was first formed. Our dialogue between Muslims and Christians will not be conducted in isolation. It remains open towards the other religions and the main ideologies of the contemporary world. In particular, we desire the presence of our Jewish brothers in our discussions between monotheistic believers. It is only circumstantial factors (e.g. the problem of Palestine which is inevitably raised in every meeting between Jews, Muslims and Christians) and practical difficulties (it being simpler, for example, to begin a dialogue with just two partners) which have led us to postpone to better days the dialogue of more than two partners for which we heartily long.

8. GUIDELINES RECOMMENDED TO THE CHURCHES FOR STUDY AND ACTION*

From the experiences of Christians in dialogue with people of living faiths and ideologies and from the statement of the Central Committee on 'Dialogue in Community' it is evident that dialogue has become urgent for many Christians today. The Guidelines which follow are built upon the Christian convictions expressed in the first two parts of this statement; the statement and the guidelines should be read together.

It is Christian faith in the Triune God – Creator of all humankind, Redeemer in Jesus Christ, revealing and renewing Spirit – which calls us Christians to human relationship with our many neighbours. Such relationship includes dialogue; witnessing to our deepest convictions and listening to those of our neighbours. It is Christian faith which sets us free to be open to the faiths of others, to risk, to trust and to be vulnerable. In dialogue, conviction and openness are held in balance.

In a world in which Christians have many neighbours, dialogue is not only an activity of meetings and conferences, it is also a way of living our Christian faith in relationship and commitment to those neighbours with whom Christians share towns, cities, nations, and the earth as a whole. Dialogue is a style of living in relationship with neighbours. This in no way replaces or limits our Christian obligation to witness, as partners enter into dialogue with their respective commitments.

*Extract from the latest guidelines published by the World Council of Churches after the Central Committee's meeting in Jamaica, January, 1979.

These guidelines are offered to member churches of the WCC and to individual congregations in awareness of the great diversity of situations in which they find themselves. The neighbours with whom Christians enter into relationship in dialogue may be partners in common social, economic and political crises and quests; companions in scholarly work or intellectual and spiritual exploration; or, literally, the people next door. In some places, Christians and the church as an institution are in positions of power and influence, and their neighbours are without power. In other places it is the Christians who are powerless. There are also situations of tension and conflict where dialogue may not be possible or opportunities very limited. In many places people of different living faiths interact not only with each other, but also with people of various ideologies, though sometimes it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between religions and ideologies, for there are religious dimensions of ideologies and ideological dimensions of religions, Christianity included. The emergence of new religious groups in many countries has brought new dimensions and tensions to inter-religious relationships. With all this diversity in mind, the following guidelines are commended to member churches for their consideration and discussion, testing and evaluation, and for their elaboration in each specific situation.

Learning and understanding in dialogue

1. Churches should seek ways in which Christian communities can enter into dialogue with their neighbours of different faiths and ideologies.

They should also discover ways of responding to similar initiatives by their neighbours in the community.

2. Dialogues should normally be planned together.

When planned together with partners of other living faiths or ideological convictions, they may well focus on particular issues: theological or religious, political or social.

3. Partners in dialogue should take stock of the religious, cultural and ideological diversity of their local situation.

Only by being alert both to the particular areas of tension and discrimination and to the particular opportunities for conversation and co-operation in their own context will Christians and their neighbours be able to create the conditions for dialogue. They should be especially alert to infringements of the basic human rights of religious, cultural or ideological minority groups.

4. Partners in dialogue should be free to 'define themselves'.

One of the functions of dialogue is to allow participants to describe and witness to their faith in their own terms. This is of primary importance since self-serving descriptions of other peoples' faith are one of the roots of prejudice, stereotyping, and condescension. Listening carefully to the neighbours' self-understanding enables Christians better to obey the commandment not to bear false witness against their neighbours, whether those neighbours be of long established religious, cultural or ideological traditions or members of new religious groups. It should be recognized by partners in dialogue that any religion or ideology claiming universality, apart from having an understanding of itself, will also have its own interpretations of other religions and ideologies as part of its own self-understanding. Dialogue gives an opportunity for a mutual questioning of the understanding partners have about themselves and others. It is out of a reciprocal willingness to listen and learn that significant dialogue grows.

5. Dialogue should generate educational efforts in the community.

In many cases Christians, utilizing the experience of dialogue, must take the initiative in education in order to restore the distorted image of the neighbours that may already exist in their communities and to advance Christian understanding of people of other living faiths and ideologies.

Even in those situations where Christians do not live in close contact with people of the various religious, cultural and ideological traditions, they should take seriously the responsibility to study and to learn about these other traditions.

Member churches should consider what action they can take in the following educational areas:

(i) Teaching programmes in schools, colleges and adult education systems to enhance the understanding of the cultural, religious and ideological traditions of humankind; such programmes should, wherever possible, invite adherents of those traditions to make their contribution.

(ii) Teaching programmes in theological seminaries and colleges to prepare Christian ministers with the training and sensitivity necessary for inter-religious dialogue.

(iii) Positive relationships with programmes in university departments and other institutes of higher learning which are concerned with the academic study of religion.

(iv) The review of material used and teachings customarily given in courses of instruction at all levels in the churches, including at theological colleges and seminaries, with a view to eliminating anything which encourages fanaticism and insensitivity to people of other faiths and ideologies.

(v) The development of church school materials for the study of people of other faiths and ideologies.

(vi) The provision of courses for people who may be sent to serve in other cultures or who may travel as tourists in such cultures to promote their greater understanding and sensitivity.

(vii) Responsible reaction to school text books and media presentations which may prejudice the image of the neighbour.

(viii) The creative use of the media, radio, television etc., wherever possible in order to reach a wider audience in efforts to expand understanding of people of other faiths and ideologies.

Sharing and living together in dialogue

6. Dialogue is most vital when its participants actually share their lives together.

It is in existing communities where families meet as neighbours and children play together that spontaneous dialogue develops. Where people of different faiths and ideologies share common activities, intellectual interests, and spiritual quests, dialogue can be related to the whole of life and can become a style of living-in relationship. The person who asks a neighbour of another faith to explain the meaning of a custom or festival has actually taken the first step in dialogue.

Of course, dialogue between long-term neighbours may be frustrated by deeply ingrained suspicions, and men and women will have to reckon not only with the communities they seek but also with the barriers between their present communities.

7. Dialogue should be pursued by sharing in common enterprises in community.

Common activities and experiences are the most fruitful setting for dialogue on issues of faith, ideology and action. It is in the search for a just community of humankind that Christians and their neighbours will be able to help each other break out of cultural, educational, political, and social isolation in order to realize a more participatory society. It may well be that in particular settings such common enterprises will generate interreligious committees or organizations to facilitate this kind of dialogue-in-action.

8. Partners in dialogue should be aware of their ideological commitments.

Dialogue should help to reveal and to understand the ideological components of religions in particular situations. When Christians find themselves in communities with neighbours of other living faiths they may have common or diverse ideological convictions.

In such situations partners need to be sensitive to both

religious and ideological dimensions of the ongoing dialogue. Where Christians find themselves in communities with people of secular ideological convictions, the dialogue will at least expose shared contributions in a common search for the provisional goals of a better human community. Here dialogue may begin as a kind of 'internal dialogue' seeking to bring to explicit reflection and discussion issues in the encounter of the Gospel both with ideological factors in various communities where Christians find themselves, and with the ideological assumptions of Christians themselves.

9. Partners in dialogue should be aware of cultural loyalties.

Dialogue and sensitivity to neighbours need to be developed in the area of relating Christian faith to cultures. This applies especially to those places where traditional and popular culture has been unduly despised and rejected by the churches. A culture should not be romanticized or made into a false absolute but it may often challenge and enrich the expression of the Christian faith. After careful interpretation and discrimination local cultures may make meaningful contributions in symbols and liturgy, social structures, relations, patterns of healing, art, architecture and music, dance and drama, poetry and literature.

10. Dialogue will raise the question of sharing in celebrations, rituals, worship and meditation.

Human communities draw together, express and renew themselves in ritual and worship, and dialogue presumes an attitude of respect for the ritual expressions of the neighbours' community. Dialogue at times includes extending and accepting invitations to visit each other as guests and observers in family and community rituals, ceremonies, and festivals. Such occasions provide excellent opportunities to enhance the mutual understanding of neighbours.

Working together in common projects and activities or visiting in homes and at festivals will eventually raise the very difficult and important question of fuller sharing in common prayer, worship or meditation. This is one of the areas of dialogue which is most controversial and most in need of further exploration.

Whether or not any such activities are undertaken, dialogue partners will want to face squarely the issues raised, sensitive to one another's integrity and fully realizing the assumptions and implications of what is done or not done.

Planning for dialogue

11. Dialogue should be planned and undertaken ecumenically, wherever possible.

Member churches should move forward in planning for dialogue in co-operation with one another. This may well mean that regional and local councils of churches will have a separate commission on dialogue.

12. Planning for dialogue will necessitate regional and local guidelines.

As the member churches of the WCC consider, test and evaluate these guidelines they will need to work out for themselves and with their specific partners in dialogue statements and guidelines for their own use in particular situations. The WCC can best assist the member churches in their specific dialogues by itself concentrating upon the worldwide features of the Christian dialogue with people of particular religions and ideologies. For this purpose, the WCC will arrange appropriate consultations at the world level.

13. Dialogue can be helped by selective participation in world interreligious meetings and organizations.

There are now many organizations linking world religions and seeking to enable them to co-operate for various purposes, such as the struggle for peace and justice in the community and among nations. Christians involved in dialogue need to be selective in their participation in the meetings arranged by such organizations.

Christian representatives should guard the mutual recognition of and respect for the integrity of each faith. On occasion it may be necessary for Christians to make clear that their

participation does not necessarily signify acceptance of the underlying assumptions of a particular meeting or organization. Christians will normally avoid being identified with alliances against other religions or against ideologies as such. The WCC will be willing to provide consultant-observers for selected meetings of this kind but will not at present take a direct official part in the organizational structure of world interreligious organizations.

To enter into dialogue requires an opening of the mind and heart to others. It is an undertaking which requires risk as well as a deep sense of vocation. It is impossible without sensitivity to the richly varied life of humankind. This opening, this risk, this vocation, this sensitivity are at the heart of the ecumenical movement and in the deepest currents of the life of the churches. It is therefore with a commitment to the importance of dialogue for the member churches of the WCC that the Central Committee offers this statement and these guidelines to the churches.

9. SOME PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS*

1. Christians and Muslims live together in an increasingly pluralistic and interdependent world. Living together brings blessings but also problems; pluralism can be a dynamic and enriching process but it can also be intrusive and destabilizing. We therefore have a spiritual and moral duty to relate to each other in mutual respect for each other's religious convictions and commitments. As part of humanity, we accept a common God-given responsibility to work for peace and justice.

2. We should take account of the variety of situations in which Muslims and Christians live. There is no common pattern in relations between Christians and Muslims in different parts of the world. We expect people in each given situation to set the pace and choose the style for their own involvement in talking and working together. Nevertheless we recognize the extent to which we have often shared a common history and may share an increasingly common future.

3. We should draw upon the riches of the Scriptures, doctrines and traditions of both Muslims and Christians in promoting good relationships with each other. We should also be aware of the non-doctrinal factors which affect our relationships; social, political, ethnic, ideological and cultural factors may divide us or unite us.

*From a report on the planning meeting for the next major Christian-Muslim dialogue meeting (scheduled for 1980), sponsored by the World Council of Churches. This planning meeting took place in Geneva in March, 1979 with 10 Christian and 5 Muslim participants.

4. We should be aware of the suspicions which still surround dialogue in the minds of some Christians and Muslims. The process of dialogue calls for patience, generosity and courage; we should never appear to be imposing the claims of dialogue. Nevertheless, we recognize the necessity for consultation and co-operation in order to ease tensions, for example concerned with human rights. We must strive to overcome stereotypes and bias; we must try to overcome ignorance, misunderstandings and the falsifications and caricatures of each other's faith which appear in the mass media, textbooks, etc.

5. We welcome dialogue between Muslims and Christians as a mood, a spirit and an attitude which may appear new but which are in fact integral to the teachings and history of our respective faiths. Dialogue is a readiness to learn as well as to share information, to receive as well as to give.

6. Building upon this attitude and readiness Christians and Muslims may undertake deliberate meetings for dialogue but may also undertake concrete projects co-operatively and in mutual respect.

7. We respect a vocation for dialogue as one among many vocations which may contribute to improving Christian-Muslim understanding and relations. However, we recognize that dialogue may also be abused and exploited. We therefore insist that dialogue must never be used as a tool for proselytism.

8. Organized missionary activities generate tensions between Christians and Muslims and are causing increasing concern. In order to build trust and confidence and for the sake of future relations between us these activities should be restrained. However, proper understanding of each other's beliefs, teaching and attitudes should be facilitated.

9. We should welcome and stimulate the enthusiasm about improving understanding and relations such as is often shown by some of the younger generation. For some people dialogue can be part of their own spiritual experience and self-awareness. A deliberate effort should be made to

encourage and enable young Christians and young Muslims to meet each other.

10. We see the importance of involving in dialogue all the various levels – official, popular and academic – in both our communities. Particular efforts should be made to engage both these organizations and individuals with special interest and experience of Christian-Muslim relations and those men and women, young and old, with appropriate qualifications who command the trust of their own community. We recognize that different criteria for involvement will be used depending upon whether it is a mainly consultative or mainly representative meeting or project. We should be sensitive to the provision of translation and interpretation facilities.

11. We desire to avoid all confusion and syncretism which may come from attempts to worship together. We may however expect to invoke God's blessing on all we undertake together and to listen together to our respective scriptures.

12. We desire that all planning should continue to be undertaken jointly by both partners.

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The series of DOCUMENTS ON CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS is intended for Muslims who desire to study Christianity and for those who meet Christians in various situations all over the world, ranging from co-operation and dialogue to encounters in the mission field. The series consists of collections of documents, each covering a special theme, considered to be of value for Muslims and assisting them to obtain information from original sources. The series will concentrate on current issues of special concern to Muslims and the collections of documents will be published at convenient intervals.

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